**1 Thessalonians 2:17-18**

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**Our Adversary, The Devil**

***17 But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short while—in person, not in spirit—were all the more eager with great desire to see your face. 18 For we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, more than once—and yet Satan hindered us.***

* In the previous verses Paul explained that his departure from Thessalonica was a result of **having been *driven out*** of the region by the evil and jealous Jews.
  + Just as the Jews **killed the Lord Jesus**, and just as Israel has a long national history of **killing the prophets whom God had sent to them**, so Paul and his missionary team were, likewise, ***driven out*** of northern Greece by evil men.
* Now, here in v. 17-18, Paul again expresses his great affection for the Thessalonian brethren, his great desire to see them again, while at the same time explaining that Satan was going to great effort to prevent his return to them.
  + And in expressing his great affection for them, Paul uses very strong and descriptive language to express himself.

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**Like a parent ripped away from his children**

***v. 17— But we, brethren, having been taken away from you . . .***

* Paul first expresses the feelings he and his companions felt when they were ***driven from*** the region as ***having been taken away from you***.
  + The English translation, ***taken away***, sounds rather benign. But the word Paul uses . . . *aporphanizō* . . . is **a very strong, emotional word that means “to make an orphan.”**
  + The use of this word conveys the great emotional distress that Paul and his companions felt as they were forced . . . by threats to their very lives . . . to flee from Thessalonica because of the fierce persecution of the Jews.
* It is interesting that Paul uses this term . . . **“to make an orphan”** . . . here in v. 17 after having previously described their relationship to the Thessalonians as being **like** ***a nursing mother who tenderly cares for her own children*** in v. 7, and one of ***exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children*** in v. 11.
  + Here in v. 17 Paul now describes the forced separation by their countrymen as being like children whose parents have been forcibly taken from them.
  + In effect, Paul sees the Thessalonians as being like spiritual orphans . . . having had their spiritual parents ripped away from them by the evil and violence of the enemies of Christ.
  + The picture Paul paints by his use of this word is of a traumatic event that results in orphan children being forced to fend for themselves as their parents are taken away.
* **One of the great fears that every parent with young children faces is the fear of “what will happen to my children if something happens to me?”**
  + And this is a justifiable fear. Throughout human history such traumatic events have happened far too often . . . sometimes with terrible and tragic results.
  + Stories of parents and their children being forcibly separated are all-too-common throughout human history.
  + Sometimes the separation is temporary, but all-too-often the separation is permanent . . . either by death or by a situation that lasts for the duration of one’s life.
  + Personally, I can think of no greater sense of loss or trauma than of a parent being forcibly separated from a child . . . not knowing what has happened to that child . . . if he or she is even still alive.
  + So, anyone who has ever been the parent of a young child knows the fear of a situation in which his or her child is left a defenseless orphan.
* Then, while lamenting the fact that Paul and his companions had been ***taken away*** from the Thessalonians, Paul reminds them, in the next phrase, that their separation was only temporary. Paul states . . . ***But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short while***.
  + We already know that Silas and Timothy had been able to return to Thessalonica. So, most of the missionary group were reunited with the saints in Thessalonica. Only Paul was prevented from returning, up to the time he wrote this letter.
* But, while Silas and Timothy had been able to return to them, Paul had not been able. Even so, Paul tells them that though he was temporarily separated from them, his absence was ***in person, not in spirit***.

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* + In other words, **though you are out of my sight, you are not out of my prayers.** Paul continued to pray diligently that God would protect the young believers whom he had been ripped away from.

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* In fact, despite the persecution he had suffered while in Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea, Paul was undeterred in his desire to return to Thessalonica. He states this desire clearly in v. 17 when he states that **he was** ***all the more eager with great desire to see your face.***
  + This phrase, ***all the more eager with great desire*** uses two superlatives to express Paul’s intensity of emotion as he expresses his unwavering desire and determination to return to renew his relationship with the Thessalonians.
  + The phrase, literally translated means **“abundantly with great yearning.”**
  + The phrase, as Paul uses it here in v. 17, conveys the great intensity of emotion he felt toward these close friends he had been forced to leave.
* Then, at the end of v. 17, Paul tells his readers the object of his **“abundantly great yearning”** . . . Paul’s desire ***to see your face***.

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* + This phrase . . . ***to see your face*** . . . is a Greek idiom meaning, **“to see you face to face.”**
  + Having just stated that he had been **torn away from them** ***in person, but not in spirit***, Paul now states his **abundantly great yearning** and goal of remedying this situation by returning to see them **face-to-face**.

**The reason Paul had been unable to return**

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***v. 18— For we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, more than once—and yet Satan hindered us.***

* Then, having once again expressed **his great affection** for the Thessalonians, that **his departure was an unwilling one**, and **his goal of being reunited with them** . . . in v. 18 Paul then explains **why he had not returned to see them before now . . . *for we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, more than once—and yet Satan hindered us.***
  + Here in this verse Paul makes **a very significant statement regarding the role of Satan in the persecution the missionaries had suffered**.
  + Once again, I believe the English translation does not do justice to the original Greek language that Paul uses.
* As you study Paul’s various letters to the churches in the New Testament you notice that he likes to employ metaphors to add vividness to his writing. Paul is particularly fond of metaphors referring to **athletic competition, military strategy and slavery**.
  + For example, in 1 Corinthians 9:24, knowing that the Greeks placed great importance and societal pride in athletic achievement, Paul describes the Christian life as being like **running a race**.

***1 Corinthians 9:24— Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win.***

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* + - In this verse Paul likens Christians to runners, running a race. But unlike the Greek games, every runner who finishes the race receives the winner’s prize.
  + In Galatians 3:23 Paul describes **the Law of God as** **a prison that keeps all mankind imprisoned and that faith is the only means by which we can be freed from the prison.**

***Galatians 3:23— But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed.***

* + Regarding his use of military metaphors and language, in Philippians 2:25 Paul refers to Epaphroditus, the messenger who bore the letter, as ***my fellow soldier***.
  + In Ephesians 6:10-18 Paul uses the example of the armor of the Roman Legionnaires in describing the various pieces of **the full armor of God.**
* Here, in 1 Thessalonians 2:18 Paul uses another **military metaphor** when he states the reason he had not returned to Thessalonica is because ***Satan hindered us***.

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* + The term for ***hindered*** . . . *egkoptō* . . . literally means “to impede one’s course by cutting off his way.”
  + In the Greek and Roman cultures the word *egkoptō* was a word that was used to describe the strategy of an army intentionally impeding an enemy’s progress by destroying roads and bridges.
    - In other words, to ***hinder*** someone did not merely mean “to block the road.” The concept of ***hindering*** someone was more akin to “blowing up the road . . . and the bridges too!”
  + Here, in v. 18 Paul is equating the work of Satan to that of **blocking or impeding the progress of the gospel** in the same way that an enemy army destroys roads and bridges to halt the advance of the enemy.
  + And in Paul’s case, Satan’s primary means of ***hindering* the progress of the gospel**. . . as Paul explains in v. 15-16 . . . was to provoke the Jews to jealousy and to incite the pagan Gentile mobs to pursue and run Paul out of town and out of the region . . . and to prevent him from returning.
* It is significant to note, as we read v. 18, that Paul says that it was ***Satan*** who ***hindered*** his return to Thessalonica, **not the Jews or the Gentiles.**
* The reason this is significant is because **Paul is teaching us here that Satan was the instigator of the persecution against them**.
  + Paul doesn’t say how he knew that Satan was the instigator of the opposition against him. Did he have some special revelation or knowledge that allowed him to know that it was Satan working against him? or is Paul teaching us a general rule regarding the role of Satan and his demons in the world?
  + We know that God did give Paul special revelation at various times during his ministry. For example, we learn in Acts 16:6 that Paul and his companions were ***forbidden to speak the word in Asia***. Later, in Acts 16:9 Paul is given a vision of ***a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."***
  + But while Paul is given direct revelation to go to Macedonia in Acts 16:9, we don’t know how God communicated His prohibition of Paul speaking the word in Asia, as he states in Acts 16:6. **Was it a series of events that worked to prevent him going into Asia or was it a direct revelation from God? We don’t know.**
  + The same question arises here in 1 Thessalonians 2:18. How did Paul know that it was **Satan who hindered them in Thessalonica?**

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**How does Satan work?**

* One of the things was have to understand about the operation of Satan in the world is that **he very rarely acts directly upon people. Satan most often works through the agency of others** **means.**
  + In other words, **Satan uses tools of the natural world to accomplish his purposes**.
  + For example, in one of the most explicit descriptions of Satan working in the world, we see Satan attacking Job through the agency of the natural world.
  + When Satan is first given permission from God to test Job . . . in Job 1:13-19 . . . Satan uses various natural means to test Job.
    - In v. 13-15 we learn that a human band of raiders, **the Sabeans**, steal the oxen and donkeys of his oldest son and kill his servants.
    - In v. 16 we learn that fire rains down from the sky and kills his sheep and his servants.
    - In v. 17 Job is told that three bands of Chaldean raiders stole his camels and killed his servants.
    - In v. 18-19 Job is told that his sons and daughters were all gathered together for a family dinner when a great storm came and caused the house they were in to collapse, killing all his children.
    - In none of these events did Satan act directly to kill, but through the agency of other forces and people.
  + Later, when Satan is given permission to test Job a second time, but prohibited from killing him, we learn in Job 2:7 that Satan uses boils . . . a disease or condition that was known to afflict the human body . . . to test Job. Satan does not touch Job directly, but through the agency of human disease.
* In the example of Satan testing and afflicting Job we see that he uses other humans as instruments of evil.
  + In using the Sabean and Chaldeans to steal Job’s property and kill his servants, the humans became tools in the hands of Satan.
* My purpose here in citing the example of Satan’s actions in testing Job is to make the point that Satan has many different ways of interfering in and disrupting our lives. And in the example of Paul, he tells us here in 1 Thessalonians 2:18 that Satan was quite active in ***hindering*** . . . or **preventing** . . . Paul from returning to Thessalonica.
* **How did Satan do this?**  We are not told. But in light of the fact that the Jews and Gentiles had been provoked to persecute him so relentlessly and so brutally, we can assume that, at the very least, Satan was provoking and persuading men to become his instruments of evil.

**How does Satan provoke men to evil?**

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* When I say that Satan was able to provoke and persuade men to become his instruments of evil, the question that immediately popped into your minds is, **“how does Satan provoke or persuade men to become his instruments of evil?”**
  + The simple and honest answer to this question is, **I don’t know, for certain**. **But we are able to infer or discern some of Satan’s methods by lessons from Scripture and by anecdotal evidence.**
* The first evidence and best evidence we can examine is the evidence of the Lord’s actions. Let’s look at the example we find in Luke 9:51-56.
  + In this passage, we find the Lord traveling with His disciples . . .

***Luke 9:51-56— 51 When the days were approaching for His ascension, He was determined to go to Jerusalem; 52 and He sent messengers on ahead of Him, and they went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make arrangements for Him. 53 But they did not receive Him, because He was traveling toward Jerusalem. 54 When His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" 55 But He turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; 56 for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." And they went on to another village.***

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* + In this example we see that when He is refused hospitality by the Samaritan villagers, the Lord does not become enraged and punish them for their evil or insolence. James and John . . . on the other hand . . . are upset that the Lord was so poorly treated and offer to destroy the village on His behalf.
  + There, in that brief example, we see attitude that the Lord continuously conveyed to His disciples . . . that they be merciful and patient toward those who had wronged Him.
  + In this example, and many others found in the gospels, we see the Lord’s response to persecution and evil . . . mercy and long-suffering.
  + James and John . . . on the other hand . . . demonstrate the human response to persecution and evil . . . anger and a desire for retribution.
* It is this human response of anger and retribution that Satan and his demons so often prey upon.
* Remember how Paul described the Jews in 1 Thessalonians 2:15-16? Paul says of the Jews in Thessalonica that they ***15 both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men, 16 hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them to the utmost.***

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* + It was not enough for the Jews to reject the message and truth of the gospel when Paul preached it, just as it was not enough for the Jews to reject the message of their Old Testament prophets when God sent them.
  + No. It was not enough to merely reject the message. Their opposition to the message of the Old Testament prophets and the gospel of Jesus Christ was so strong that **they rejected the messages and they killed the messengers**.
  + Such over-the-top animosity toward the prophets and the evangelists of the gospel is much stronger than simple anger. The anger that provokes a person to murderous rage is quite often demonically-inspired . . . man’s natural anger whipped into a frenzy by the inspiration and suggestion of demons.
* We see excellent examples of demonically-inspired murderous rages found in the actions of King Saul in 1 Samuel. After Saul had sinned grievously against God, God withdrew His Spirit from Saul and allowed an evil spirit to enter him. We read this in 1 Samuel 16 . . .

***1 Samuel 16:14-15— 14 Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD terrorized him. 15 Saul's servants then said to him, "Behold now, an evil spirit from God is terrorizing you.***

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* On several occasions the evil spirit that terrorized and oppressed Saul would incite Saul to lash out in murderous rages and cause him to attempt to kill David. We see two occasions . . .

***1 Samuel 18:10-11— 10 Now it came about on the next day that an evil spirit from God came mightily upon Saul, and he raved in the midst of the house, while David was playing the harp with his hand, as usual; and a spear was in Saul's hand. 11 Saul hurled the spear for he thought, "I will pin David to the wall." But David escaped from his presence twice.***

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***1 Samuel 19:9-10— 9 Now there was an evil spirit from the LORD on Saul as he was sitting in his house with his spear in his hand, and David was playing the harp with his hand. 10 Saul tried to pin David to the wall with the spear, but he slipped away out of Saul's presence, so that he stuck the spear into the wall. And David fled and escaped that night.***

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* + Saul resented David because God’s favor had been removed from him and given to David. But although Saul resented David, a rational Saul would not have tried to kill David. But a demonically-influenced or possessed Saul certainly was capable of such murderous hatred.

**Demonic activity in the world today**

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* It is a known fact that the amount of demonic activity in the world was exceptionally strong during the time of Christ and the early years of the church.
  + Not only did Satan attempt to thwart God’s plans for mankind during the life of Christ, but Satan also attempted to thwart the spread of the gospel as Paul and the other apostles and missionaries traveled outward from Jerusalem with the message of the gospel.
* Among modern biblical scholars and theologians it is generally believed that the degree of demonic activity in the world today has increased to a degree nearly as intense as the time of Christ.
  + Evidence of increased demonic activity can be found in simply reading the news of the day. Every day we read accounts of mothers and fathers killing their children. We read of people committing atrocities to strangers that shock the conscience.
  + And often when these people are questioned as to why they committed such heinous acts, they will often say “I don’t know” or that “a voice in my head told me to.”
  + The number of times we read of people doing things under what can only be described as demonic influence and oppression is growing daily.

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**The purpose of demonic activity**

* When we talk about demonic activity in the world, we have to understand **the purpose of demonic activity**. Demonic or demonically-inspired actions have **two primary purpose . . . to thwart the work of God and to incite men and women to self-destructive behavior**.
  + In the case of Paul and his missionary team, the demonic activity came in the form of inciting the unbelieving Jews and Gentiles to persecute and injure them. By their irrational hatred, Satan was inciting the mob to ***hinder*** the progress of the gospel message.
  + The second . . . and more predominant . . . purpose for demonic activity in the world is to incite men and women to destructive and self-destructive behavior.
  + Satan and his demons know that their fate and their judgment is assured and unavoidable. But in the time that they have remaining before they are consigned to the Lake of Fire, Satan and his demons are seeking to do as much damage to mankind as possible. And that damage comes in many forms . . . deception . . . inciting to violence . . . driving men and women to suicide . . . incitement of immorality . . . persecution of God’s children.
    - Everything Satan does in the world is for the purpose of injuring mankind and preventing unbelievers from hearing the word of God so that they will not be saved.
* As we get closer and closer to end-times events and the return of Christ, the amount of demonic activity in opposition to God is growing greater and greater. Satan and his demons are not going down peacefully or without a fight.
  + And one of the greatest pieces of evidence that we are very close to the beginning of end-times events is the explosion of demonic activity in the world. People are now doing things that are previously unheard of and on a scale not seen since the time of Christ.
  + The degree of moral depravity and the parading of that depravity in gleeful disobedience to the teaching of Scripture is truly astounding.
* And not only is mankind becoming more evil and depraved in its willful disobedience to God’s revealed will, but mankind now revels in its depravity.
  + And, furthermore, mankind not only revels in its depravity, but the evil of mankind has come to the point that they actively persecute those who do not agree with, endorse and participate in their ungodliness.
* But when confronted with the depth of ungodliness in the world today, the question then arises, **“is this immorality and ungodliness a result of mere human depravity or is it a result of demonic influence?”**
  + The answer to this question is **“both.” The immorality in the world today . . . and the extent of the world’s immorality is due to both man’s inherent depravity provoked and encouraged by the influence and oppression of the demonic realm.**
  + It is unregenerate man’s natural bent to oppose God. But man’s natural bent to oppose God is being emboldened and heightened in its active opposition to God through the agency of the demonic realm.
* It is not enough that homosexuality must now be tolerated by society. It is not enough that homosexuality be legitimized by society’s laws. It is not enough that society now persecutes those who persist in their narrow-minded beliefs against normalizing homosexual behavior. Society is now attempting to force Bible-believing people to applaud and endorse those who practice abhorrent immoral behavior.
  + And, to a large degree, the hatred directed toward those who hold to the biblical standard of morality is inspired and empowered by the demonic realm.
* Several weeks ago I quoted Richard Lenski in regard to the efforts of the Jews of Thessalonica to prevent the Gentiles from hearing and believing the gospel. Lenski states that “the worst feature of unbelief is not in its own damnation, but its efforts to frustrate the salvation of others.”

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* + Based upon Lenski’s quote, I believe that a similar statement can be made in regard to the role of demonic influence upon unbelievers. I believe that “the worst feature of those who oppose God and God’s word is not in their own damnation, but it is their efforts to rob others of the joy and benefit of biblical obedience.”

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* + **In other words, it is bad enough that the ungodly oppose God. But what makes it worse is the insistence and requirement of the ungodly that we approve of and applaud their ungodliness.**

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* Now, the ungodly of the world will certainly howl in objection to the things I have just said. They will claim that they are enlightened and practice diversity, while we, Christians, are narrow-minded and intolerant.
  + To this accusation I answer, “yes, true Christians are narrow-minded and intolerant.” We are only willing to accept as good and normal that which God declares to be good and normal.
  + And regarding the accusation that we are intolerant, I also agree . . . we are intolerant of anyone who calls evil good and good evil. We are tolerant only of that which Scripture declares to be good and we reject the standards of the world, which stands in opposition to God’s word.
* We should equate it this way . . . Matthew 7:13-14 states . . .

***Matthew 7:13-14— 13 "Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. 14 "For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.***

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* + The only way you can ***enter through the narrow gate*** and walk along the ***narrow way*** is to be “narrow-minded.”
  + On the other hand, if you are traveling the ***broad road that leads to destruction***, you have the room to be open-minded and tolerant to diverse attitudes.
  + **Narrow-mindedness is for those who strive to walk the narrow way . . . Open mindedness is for those who are walking the broad road.**

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* Paul’s mention of Satan’s work in ***hindering*** his return to Thessalonica is an important point that we should keep in mind.
  + We know very little about how Satan works. But he and his minions are constantly at work in the world, inciting men and women to self-destructive behavior to prevent them from being obedient to God.
* From our human standpoint, Satan’s work in the world can have tragic consequences to those people who are deceived into believing that they are doing God’s work.
  + Take the example of **“the Crusades.”**
    - The Crusades began in 1095 with the speech made by Pope Urban II. In that speech, Pope Urban II referred to the Christians as the noble race of the Franks and he encouraged Christians to join their armies to free the religious sites of Jerusalem from the Muslims.
    - The Crusades lasted for nearly 200 years in a series of 8 campaigns. While many hundreds of thousands of men fought, thinking themselves to be doing God’s work, they were actually deceived into engaging in a fruitless and evil “holy war.”
    - In the end, the crusades degenerated into a war against everyone who did not follow their religion and did not look like them. This included Muslims, Jews, and even dark-skinned Christians, all of whom were attacked and murdered by them.
  + Despite the fact that the Crusaders thought they were doing God’s work and fighting on God’s side, you can be assured that Satan was encouraging them the entire time. Men killing other men for no other reason than the fact that they looked different.
  + That is Satan’s best work . . . operating in the background so that no one knows or sees what is really going on.
* But here in 1 Thessalonians 2:18 Paul tells us that while the jealous Jews and pagan Gentiles were his physical opponents, it was Satan . . . operating in the background . . . who was his real opponent.
  + And for us, who live in this time of increasing demonic activity, we will do well to remember the instruction of Paul in exhorting us to use **the full armor of God** in Ephesians 6:11-12 . . .

***Ephesians 6:11-12— 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.***

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* Just as Paul faced the daily struggle of spiritual warfare, we should daily prepare to battle the forces of wickedness now in the world so that we are able to **stand firm against the schemes of the devil**.
  + All thanks and praise to God that He has given us the victory through Christ Jesus.